

Dr. John Frissell House
54 Fourteenth Street
Wheeling
Ohio County
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-197

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35-WHEEL
32-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DR. JOHN FRISSELL HOUSE

HABS No. WV-197

Location: Fourteenth Street, Wheeling,
Ohio County, West Virginia.

Present Owner: Peter James Erb.

Present Occupants: McGann March Inc.
Mary E. O'Neill.
Whetelco Federal Credit Union.

Present Use: Apartment and business offices.

Significance: Built about 1835, the Frissell House is one of the oldest structures in downtown Wheeling. It is a simple three bay brick house with a double end chimney. The only decorative detail is the cast iron handrailing which leads up the steps to the front door. Dr. John Frissell was a brilliant and highly respected Wheeling surgeon whose family lived in this brick house for nearly one hundred years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1835. The property is mentioned in a Deed of Trust between Jacob Bier and Joseph Caldwell. Deed of Trust Book 20, page 247, dated 15 April, 1835, "being 44 feet in front on Quincy Street... on which is erected a brick house now in the occupancy of Thomas Morris, brewer." Earlier deeds found in Deed Book 12, page 483 and Deed Book 13, page 174, dated 14 July, 1825 and 19 June 1826 refer to Lots 1 and 2 of Graham's Addition as being "cultivated as a garden."
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Frissell House was built on the southeast one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition, Square 16.

1825 Deed, 14 July, recorded in Book 12, page 483. Morgan Nelson to Patience Graham. Lots 1 and 2 of Graham's Addition "then cultivated by the said Michael (Graham) as a garden."

1833 Deed, 9 May, recorded in Book 18, page 242. Patience Graham to Jacob E. Bier \$1,000.00 for all of Lot 1, Graham's Addition.

- 1839 Deed, 21 March, recorded in Book 22, page 398. Jacob E. Bier, and wife to Archibald Fisher \$2000.00 for southeast one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition (described: 44' on Quincy Street (now Fourteenth Street) on north and 50' on alley to the east.")
- 1843 Deed, 4 December, recorded in Book 26, page 561. Samuel Atkinson, Trustee for Archibald Fisher to Thomas M. Hudson \$1400.00 for east one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition.
- 1853 Deed, 24 August, recorded in Book 38, page 312. Thomas M. Hudson to John Frissell \$2500.00 for east one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition.

John Frissell devised to Elizabeth, his wife, Charles M., his son, Walker I., his son, equal interest in east one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition.

- 1918 Will, probated 19 February, recorded in Will Book 12, page 137. Charles M. Frissell devised to Sophia W., his wife, Eliza L., his daughter "my estate real, personal, and mixed," his one half interest in east one third of Lot 1, "known also as 54 Fourteenth Street."
- 1944 Will, probated 8 December, recorded in Will Book 24, page 161. Walker I. Frissell devised to Clara Beall Frissell, his wife Item IV: conveyed his one half interest in the property at 54 Fourteenth Street.
- 1947 Will, probated 5 May, recorded in Will Book 25, page 410. Clara Beall Frissell devised to Louisiana (Louise) Beall Paull Item 12: conveyed her one half interest in the property at 54 Fourteenth Street.
- 1948 Deed, 21 April, recorded in Book 306, page 48. Sophia W. Frissell and Eliza L. Frissell to Louise Beall Paull their one half interest in the property at 54 Fourteenth Street.
- 1949 Deed, 12 July, recorded in Book 316, page 331, Louise B. Paull to Peter J. Erb, and wife Mary N. property known as 54 Fourteenth Street, east one third of Lot 1, Graham's Addition.
- 1970 Will, probated 4 May, recorded in Will Book 57, page 239. Mary N. Erb devised to Peter James Erb, her son property known as 54 Fourteenth Street.

4. Original plans, construction, etc: None known.

5. Alterations and additions: According to Mr. Peter James Erb, Jr., the only significant structural change has been the introduction of a partition wall along the hallway. This separates the McGann Marsh Inc, computer typesetting center from the upstairs apartment. The back portion of the house has been modernized by the addition of a kitchen, and the sunporch has been connected to the rest of the house through a rear window which has been turned into a doorway. The second floor has been remodeled and modernized by the Erbs, but it was inaccessible.

Mr. Erb said that when he moved into this house the basement was full of medical supplies and instruments which were used in a basement clinic. Access to this clinic is visible in an undated photograph found in Charles J. Milton's Landmarks of Old Wheeling (page 58). In this photograph an entryway to the basement is visible under the front porch.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

The first written document which refers to a house on Lot 1, Graham's Addition (Square 16) is found in a Deed of Trust between Jacob Bier and Joseph Caldwell (Deed of Trust Book 20, page 247, dated 15 April 1835) in which specific note is taken of the "brick house now in the occupancy of Thomas Morris, brewer." Prior to that time deeds dated 1825 and 1826 refer to Lots 1 and 2 of Graham's Addition as being "cultivated as a garden."

There is no further written documentation available to date the house more precisely. Both the architect and the builder are unknown. The extreme simplicity of this building and the presence of an interior double end chimney generally found in houses built in the Wheeling area about 1840 has led local historians to believe that the building was built about 1835 by Jacob Bier.

The most notable figure associated with the property at 54 Fourteenth Street is Dr. John Frissell. Born and educated in Massachusetts, Dr. Frissell's medical studies had prepared him well for the surgical demands of Wheeling's industrial and manufacturing activities. In 1853 he was the first surgeon in western Virginia to use chloroform in a critical operation

Dr. Frissell served as chief physician and surgeon of Wheeling's hospitals for twenty years. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War loyalist governor Pierpont appointed Dr. Frissell the medical superintendent of military prisoners and soldiers stationed in Wheeling. As a "skillful and judicious practitioner" he became known as one of the best surgeons and most eminent physicians of West Virginia. He was elected the first president of the Medical Society of the State of West Virginia in 1867.

The Frissell family continued to reside at 54 Fourteenth Street after Dr. Frissell's death until 1948 when the Erb family assumed ownership.

C. Sources of Information:

Anonymous. History of the Upper Ohio Valley. Madison, Wisconsin:
Brant and Fuller, 1890.

Milton, Charles J. Landmark of Old Wheeling and Surrounding Country.
Wheeling, West Virginia, 1943.

Newton, J. H., Nichols, C. C., and Sprankle, A. C. History of the
Panhandle, Ohio, Brooke, Hancock, and Marshall. Wheeling, West
Virginia: J. A. Caldwell, 1879.

Wingerter, Charles A. History of Greater Wheeling and Vicinity.
Chicago and New York. The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912.

Interview: Mrs. William Fluty, member, Friends of Wheeling, Inc.
July 19, 1976.

Prepared by: Candace Reed
Architectural Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September 1976

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This two-and-a-half-story brick residence is one of the earlier residences still standing in East Wheeling, having been built prior to 1840.
2. Condition of fabric: Moderate, needs interior repairs. Exterior newly painted blue with white trim. Roof cornice and fascia deteriorating at some points.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is basically a rectangle, divided into two sections. The main two-and-a-half-story section is twenty six feet across the front (north) and approximately thirty six feet deep, plus a ten foot deep addition. The smaller section is eighteen plus feet across the front (north), is set back four feet from the face of the main section, and extends back on the site approximately the same distance as the main section, including an addition.
2. Number of bays: Main section - three bays; smaller section - two bays.

3. Number of stories:
 - a. Main section: Two-and-one-half stories. The bottom floor (basement) is one half level below grade and is entered through a door on the west side of that section. The major floor is five feet above grade and is entered from a stoop on the front (north).
 - b. Smaller section: One-and-a-half stories. The bottom floor (basement) is one half below grade and is entered through an areaway on the front (north) of that section. Both the basement and first floor are on the same plane as the main section. The first floor of this section has no direct access from the exterior on the front. There is a small frame addition at the rear of this section, projecting a half level above the roof.
4. Layout, shape: Rectangular in two parts, one somewhat smaller than the other,
5. Foundations: Masonry, brick.
6. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are Flemish bond masonry on the two original building sections. The additions to the rear are primarily frame with shiplap siding plus some concrete block. The building is painted gray.
7. Structural system, framing: Timber frame and masonry bearing walls.
8. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: The main section has a front stoop which is entered from the side, along the face of the building. It has nine sandstone steps leading to the platform at the entry. The steps and stoop are enclosed and faced with cut stone which is spalling. An ornate cast iron balustrade is a particularly striking element of this entry. This entry stoop is somewhat unusual for the Wheeling area and lends additional interest to an otherwise simple facade.
9. Chimneys: There are five brick chimneys on the building. Four of these are double chimneys, one pair on each face of the east and west facades, main section. The double chimney is characteristic of early Wheeling residences.
10. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: The front door of the main section is original. It is an eight-panel door recessed in the wall, with side panels in the casing. Both the door, casing and all trim areas are painted white. Above the door is a decorative stained fixed glass transom. The curved design is dark green and is on a yellow-orange background. The lintel over the doorway is stone, very simple. The only decorative features are small horizontal striations at the extremities. The front door of the small section is not original.

- b. Windows and shutters: All windows have simple stone sills and lintels. The rectangular lintels are void of decorations with the exception of small horizontal striations at the extremities. SEE photographs and elevation for front windows. There is no evidence that there have ever been shutters. An interesting feature is the single window located between the double chimneys at the attic level on both the east and west walls. There is also a shallow bay window on the east. It is probably not original. All window trim on the building is painted white.

11. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Both sections of the original house have gable roofs with the ridges parallel to the front. The roof shapes of the rear additions are combination gable and shed form. The main section has only an asphalt covering, while the small section has a standing seam tin roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The only cornice of note is that on the front of the main section. SEE photographs and elevation. The cornice is about sixteen inches deep. The roof overhang on the front is about fourteen inches.

C. Description of the Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: There is a full basement under both sections of the house with the exception of one part of the addition. The basement is entered from both the front and rear. Interior access was apparently from a stairway at the southeast corner of the main section, but it has been removed. The basement is divided into three major spaces and one small linear one along the east wall of the main section.

The first floor bears some resemblance to its former organization. The basic layout has the entry at the left, a small enclosed foyer, a stairway to the upper floor on the extreme left, and two rooms to the right, forming the basic living spaces. These are divided by a large double sliding glass panel doorway which may not be original but is very early. The small section is connected through a center hallway. There is a front room in that section that is original. Other portions of the first floor have been altered considerably through additions. The second floor apartment was inaccessible.

- 2. Stairways: The stair connecting the first floor and the basement has been removed. The stairway from the first floor to the second is along the east wall, leading straight up to a small second floor landing.

3. Flooring, wall and ceiling finishes: The basement walls are plaster over masonry, the ceiling is plastered, and the floor is a combination of wood and concrete. On the first floor the floors are carpeted, while the walls and ceilings are generally plastered and painted. Parts of the addition employ more contemporary materials and finishes.
4. Doors and doorways: Of particular note is the large doorway connecting the two large rooms of the main section. Two heavy glass paneled pocket doors, when closed, separate the two rooms. It is not known whether these are original, but they are early.
5. Special decorative features: Much of the doorway and ceiling trim is original wood, painted white. The trim is more detailed in the main section than in the smaller section. The fireplace mantels are of particular note. Of special interest is the mantel on the west wall of the front room, main section. It is black-green marble, inlaid with a scroll design across the face on each side of the top. The design is brushed with orange paint, and gold painted striping is employed for accent. Miniature columns support the mantel top. The hearth is ceramic tile alternating in a brown and blue pattern. The mantel of the west wall, front room of small section, is also of interest. It is oak with fine exposed wood grain and is in a classical motif.
6. Notable hardware: The only hardware of note is the lock on the front door. The large keyhole and iron lock are still relatively intact and appear to be original.
7. Mechanical equipment: Conventional steam radiators.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The house is in an urban setting on the south side of Fourteenth Street, facing north. There is an alley along the east side and an open parking lot at the rear. There was apparently another building adjoining this one on the west, since destroyed, as evidenced by the broken face of the brick wall and the ghost of a chimney against the west wall. There is no landscaping and there are no outbuildings.

Prepared by: John McRae
Architectural Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September 1976

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, HABS Principal Architect, in cooperation with the Friends of Wheeling, Inc. The measured drawings were made during the summer of 1976 under the supervision of John M. McRae (University of Florida) with architectural technicians Mark L. Hall, Foreman, (Pennsylvania State University); Edward C. Freeman (Arizona State University); Ruthie D. Wiley (Mississippi State University); Alan G. Wilig (City College of New York); and Architectural Historian Candace Reed (George Washington University). The photographs were taken in 1977 by HABS Photographer Jack E. Boucher.